DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 354 119 RC 018 957

AUTHOR O'Hare, William P.; Curry-White, Brenda
TITLE The Rural Underclass: Examination of Multiple-Problem Populations in Urban and Rural Settings. Staff Working Papers.
INSTITUTION Population Reference Bureau, Inc., Washington, D.C.
SPONS AGENCY Rockefeller Foundation, New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE Jan 92
NOTE 33p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Black Population Trends; Census Figures; Dropouts; *Economically Disadvantaged; *Economic Factors; Economic Status; Females; *Lower Class; Low Income Groups; Population Trends; Poverty; *Racial Distribution; Regional Characteristics; *Rural Areas; *Rural Urban Differences; Unemployment; Welfare Recipients
IDENTIFIERS United States (South)

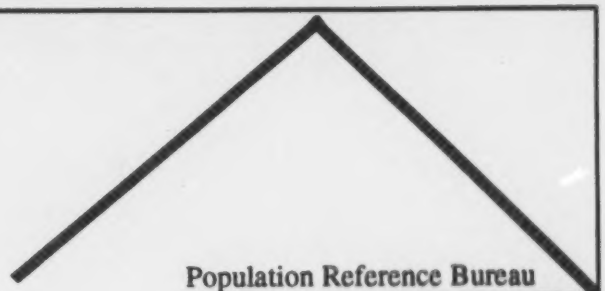
ABSTRACT

This study uses data from the U.S. Census' 1980 and 1990 Current Population Survey to examine characteristics of the underclass populations in rural and urban areas. The analysis assesses changes of metropolitan and nonmetropolitan underclass populations between 1980 and 1990, with special attention to race and geographic area. Underclass populations are defined as adults who: (1) have not completed high school; (2) receive public assistance; and (3) are single mothers or long-term unemployed. The prevalence of the underclass in rural areas (2.4%) was less than that in central cities (3.4%), but significantly higher than the level in suburban areas (1.1%). The rural poverty rate, like that of central cities, is above the national average. In rural areas, 55 percent of the underclass population is white, compared with only 17 percent in the cities. Females account for 47 percent of the rural underclass, compared with 60 percent in central cities. The rural underclass has proportionately fewer young adults (48%) and more people of preretirement age (59%). The likelihood of underclass membership among rural minorities (Blacks and Hispanics) is higher than it is for those in central cities. The rural underclass is highly concentrated in the South, whereas the urban underclass is evenly divided among census regions. The data support the idea of a black underclass migration from the rural South to Northern cities. This data requires further testing before any conclusions can be drawn. (TES)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED354119

RC



Population Reference Bureau

The Rural Underclass: Examination of Multiple-Problem Populations in Urban and Rural Settings

by
William P. O'Hare and Brenda Curry-White
University of Louisville

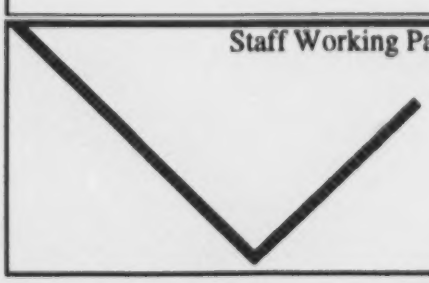
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
E. L. Hanlon

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."



Staff Working Papers

January 1992

Rc 0189577

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The Rural Underclass:
Examination of Multiple-Problem Populations
in Urban and Rural Settings

by
William P. O'Hare and Brenda Curry-White
University of Louisville

January 1992

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Financial support for for this paper was provided by a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary . . . . . *i*

Introduction 1

Background 2

Conceptualization and Measurement of the Underclass 4

Data and Definitions 6

- Cities and Rural Areas 7
- The Underclass 7
- High-School Dropouts 7
- Receipt of Public Assistance 8
- Never-Married Mothers 9
- Unemployed Men 9
- Poverty 9

Findings 10

- Overview of the Underclass 11
- Comparisons of the Rural and Urban Underclass 13
- Changes in the Rural and Urban Underclass During the 1980s . . 15
- The Underclass in Large Northern Cities and the Rural South . . 16
- The Deep South and the Border South States 20

Conclusion 21

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Among contemporary scholars the underclass is viewed primarily, if not exclusively, as an urban phenomenon. The dominate perspective on the underclass is captured by one of the leading underclass scholars, William Julius Wilson, who states, "It is clear, then, that one of the legacies of historic racial and class subjugation in America is a unique and growing concentration of minority residents in the most impoverished areas of large Northeastern and Midwestern central cities.[1] The research presented here suggests that northern inner-city minorities are not unique and that, by some measures, the black underclass is more highly concentrated in the rural South than in the urban North.

During the past decade there have been numerous studies of an American underclass; nearly all of them focused on people living in urban centers. The extent to which there may be a rural population that shares the "underclass" characteristics of the inner-city poor has been largely ignored. This study tests the hypothesis that adults with underclass characteristics are as prevalent in rural areas as they are in urban areas.

Data from the 1980 and 1990 March Current Population Survey (CPS) conducted by the U.S. Bureau of the Census are used to examine adults (ages 19 to 64) living in central cities, suburbs, and rural areas in terms of characteristics that might identify them as part of the underclass population. The definition of underclass used in this study builds on earlier work by Ricketts and Sawhill. Several traits identified with the underclass population can be measured with CPS data. For purposes of this study, the underclass population is identified as adults who exhibit all three of the following problematic traits:

1) Has not completed high school;
2) Receives public assistance;
3) If female, is a never married mother; or
   If male, lacks attachment to the labor force (that is, long-term unemployed).

Examination of the 1990 CPS data indicates that there are about 3 million adults who fit this definition of the underclass. The analysis also shows that underclass characteristics are much more common in central cities and rural areas than in suburbs. The prevalence of underclass individuals in rural areas (2.4 percent) was less than the prevalence in central cities (3.4 percent), but significantly higher than the level in suburban areas (1.1 percent).

The rural underclass differs from the urban underclass in several fundamental ways:

- In rural areas, 55 percent of the underclass population is white compared with only 17 percent in central cities. About one-third (32 percent) of the rural underclass is black compared with nearly half (49 percent) of the underclass in central cities.

---

[1]William J. Wilson, "Studying Inner-City Social Dislocations," *American Sociological Review* 56, no. 1 (Feb. 1991): 4.

- Females account for 47 percent of the rural underclass compared with 60 percent in central cities.

- The rural underclass has proportionately fewer young adults and more people of pre-retirement age. In 1990, less than half (48 percent) of the rural underclass were ages 19 to 34, but over half (59 percent) of the urban underclass were in this age group. In 1990, almost one-quarter (23 percent) of the rural underclass were ages 50 to 64, but only 15 percent of the urban underclass were in this age bracket.

- The prevalence (or rate) of underclass membership among blacks is higher in rural areas (9.1 percent) than in central cities (7.5 percent).

- The prevalence of underclass membership among Hispanics is also higher in rural areas (7.0 percent) than in central cities (6.7 percent), but the rural/urban difference is not as pronounced as that seen among blacks.

- The rural underclass is highly concentrated in the South, whereas the urban underclass is almost evenly divided among the four census regions. Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of the rural underclass resides in the South. The South is the only region where the underclass rate is higher for rural residents (3.5 percent) than for urban residents (2.6 percent).

- Blacks in the rural South have higher underclass rates than any group examined here, including blacks in large northern cities.

Much of the literature on the underclass has focused on minority populations in large cities of the North. In this study, we examine the underclass population found in the rural South and compare it with the underclass found in central cities of large metropolitan areas in the North.

There was a higher prevalence of underclass adults in the central cities of large metropolitan areas in the North (that is, the Northeast and Midwest regions) than in the rural areas of the South, but this was related to the racial composition of the two areas. Blacks represent a higher percentage of the total population of large central cities in the North, and blacks are much more likely than whites to have underclass characteristics. When blacks and whites are examined separately, however, the prevalence of underclass individuals is higher in the rural South than in central cities of the North. About one in ten black adults in the rural South fall into the underclass.

The findings of this study lend some support to Lemann's hypothesis that the black underclass found in large northern cities may be closely linked to the migration of blacks out of the rural South to northern cities. However, the hypothesis requires further testing before any conclusions can be drawn.

INTRODUCTION

During the 1980s a large number of studies focused on the identification and analysis of an underclass population in the United States. While the emergence of this issue was closely linked to journalists,[2] it also received considerable attention from academic scholars over the past decade.[3] Commentary and analysis on this issue focused almost exclusively on people living in urban centers, however. The largely urban focus of underclass research is captured in the first two sentences of a recent article in *Science* magazine where the authors say, "In recent years the media in the United States have popularized the use of the term 'underclass'. In most peoples minds the term conjures up a group of people who live in the inner city."[4]

Another example of the urban focus in underclass research is found in a special volume of *The Annals* on the underclass that contained several articles focusing specifically on inner city neighborhoods.[5] None of the articles focused on the rural poor, and most did not even mention the possibility of a rural underclass. Other recent work on the underclass has also focused exclusively on urban residents.[6] In fact, among many researchers and commentators the term "urban underclass" has become synonymous with the underclass concept.[7] There has been virtually no examination of the extent to which underclass definitions apply to rural America or the extent to which a rural underclass may exist.

This paper addresses that oversight by developing a measure of the underclass that is consistent with past research and applying it to the population in metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas. The underclass measure will also be used to assess changes in the underclass population between 1980 and 1990. The last segment of the analysis tests a hypothesis recently proffered by Lemann who suggests that the black underclass in large

---

[2]See for example, Ken Auletta, *The Underclass* (New York: Random House, 1982); George Gilder, *Wealth and Poverty* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981); Nicholas Lemann series "The Origins of the Underclass," *Atlantic Monthly* (June and July 1986); and Leon Dash's series "At Risk: The Chronicles of Teenage Pregnancy," *Washington Post* (26-31 January 1986).

[3]Christopher Jencks and Paul E. Petersen, *The Urban Underclass* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1991).

[4]Ronald B. Mincy, Isabel V. Sawhill and Douglas A. Wolf, "The Underclass: Definition and Measurement," *Science* 248 (April 1990): 450-454.

[5]William Julius Wilson, "The Ghetto Underclass: Social Science Perspectives," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 501 (January 1989).

[6]Christopher Jencks and Paul E. Petersen, *The Urban Underclass* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1991).

[7]Martha A. Gephart and Robert Pearson, "Contemporary Research on the Urban Underclass," *Items* 42 (June 1988): 1-10.

northern cities has its roots in the rural South.

BACKGROUND

Underclass researchers have overlooked the rural poor despite the fact that many of the trends in rural America mirror those identified in inner city underclass areas. For example, the poverty rate in rural America, like that in central cities, is persistently above the national average. The most recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau show that the poverty rate in the nonmetropolitan population was 16.3 percent in 1990 compared to 13.5 percent nationwide.[8] The 1990 poverty rate in large cities was 19.0 percent. In 1986, when the rural economy was in the deepest part of its recent slump, the poverty rate in rural areas was equal to that in cities (18 percent).

Rural areas have been largely ignored by underclass scholars despite the fact that the rural poor are more likely than the urban poor to be long-term poor. Persistent poverty has been a central component of the underclass concept. People who fall into poverty for a year or two because of abrupt changes in employment or marital status are different from those who remain in poverty year after year.

In this respect, several recent studies have shown that the rural poor are more likely than the urban poor to be in poverty for long periods of time.[9] One recent analysis found that between 1976 and 1985, 7.8 percent of the able-bodied poor in rural areas were long-term poor compared with only 4.4 percent in urban areas.[10]

Another characteristic typically used to describe the underclass population is their concentration in high poverty neighborhoods. Such areas of concentrated poverty clearly exist in rural areas. Research by the U.S. Department of Agriculture found 206 persistently poor rural counties, most of which are located in the South.[11] Census Bureau data indicate that the rural poor, like their urban counterparts, tend to be concentrated in geographic areas where poverty rates are extremely high.[12] About 24 percent of all people in rural

---

[8]U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Money Income and Poverty Status in the United States: 1990," *Current Population Reports* P-60, no. 175, (Washington, DC: GPO, 1991).

[9]Greg Duncan, *Years of Poverty: Years of Plenty* (Ann Arbor: Institute for Social Research, The University of Michigan, 1984): table 2.2, p. 49; and U.S. Department of Agriculture, *1986 Agricultural Chartbook*, chart 11.

[10]Terry K. Adams and Greg J. Duncan, "Long-term Poverty in Nonmetropolitan Areas" (Paper presented at conference on rural poverty, sponsored by the Aspen Institute and the Ford Foundation, Queenstown, MD, 1990).

[11]D. Bellamy, "Economic and Socio-Demographic Change in Persistent Low-income Counties: An Update" (Paper presented at the Southern Rural Sociological Association, New Orleans, LA, 1988).

[12]U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Poverty: 1990", table 9.

areas resided in high poverty communities, but 39 percent of the rural poor lived in areas with high poverty rates. Likewise, about 26 percent of all people in central cities lived in neighborhoods with high poverty rates, but 52 percent of poor people in large cities resided in such areas. The figures for central cities and rural areas contrast sharply with data on America's suburbs, where only 4 percent of suburban residents are poor; but 16 percent of the suburban poor are living in high poverty areas.

Many scholars have noted the high proportion of minorities in the underclass. In this regard, minorities in rural areas, like their counterparts in urban areas, tend to be concentrated in high poverty communities. Census Bureau data show that among blacks, 68 percent of the rural poor reside in high poverty areas—nearly the same percentage as found among poor blacks in large cities.[13] Among Latinos, the proportion of rural poor living in high poverty areas is somewhat lower than for Latinos in large cities—44 percent vs. 61 percent, respectively.

Ethnographic research suggests that there are pockets of rural poverty that rival inner-city ghettos in terms of depth and persistence of poverty and deprivation. While some of these areas are places of long-standing poverty, such as Appalachia or the Mississippi Delta, others are relatively new, such as farming communities of the northern Plains.[14]

University of Chicago sociologist William J. Wilson has identified the out-migration of middle-class blacks during the 1960s and 1970s as a major factor in the development of inner-city underclass areas.[15] Here again we see similar trends in rural America. Rural areas, like many large cities, have been experiencing out-migration and population loss since the early 1980s.[16] Between 1986 and 1987, Census Bureau data indicate that nearly a million more people moved out of rural areas than moved in.[17]

Furthermore, migration out of rural areas has been selective. One study found that more than half of the adults leaving rural areas had completed at least one year of college.[18]

---

[13] *Ibid.*, table 9.

[14] Osha Gray Davidson, *Broken Heartland: The Rise of America's Rural Ghetto* (New York: The Free Press, 1990).

[15] William J. Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

[16] William P. O'Hare, "The Rise of Poverty in Rural America," *Population Trends and Public Policy* 15 (Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau, 1988).

[17] U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Geographic Mobility: March 1986 to March 1987," *Current Population Reports* P-20, no. 430 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1989): table D.

[18] O'Hare "The Rise of Poverty," p. 2.

Among those who stayed, only 27 percent had at least one year of college. Another recent study that examined those who graduated from high school in 1980 found large and significant differences between those who left their rural hometowns and those who stayed behind.[19] Those who left were more likely to have done well in high school and were more likely to pursue college.

There is yet another parallel between rural and urban communities that has given rise to the formation of an underclass. Many scholars identify the changing economic base of large cities as a factor in the emergence and growth of the urban underclass.[20] The decline of high-paying manufacturing jobs and the emergence of lower-paying "service sector jobs" is one specific change that has played a role in the development of an urban underclass.

Similarly, economic restructuring of rural areas may be contributing to the growth of a rural underclass. Many of the industries that are the backbone of the rural economy (farming, mining, timber, and routine manufacturing, for example) all suffered declines during the 1980s.[21] Furthermore, since the economic base of most rural areas is less diverse than urban areas, the options for those thrown out of work by this economic restructuring are more limited. Most rural areas are heavily dependent on single industries and therefore are extremely vulnerable to changes in the economy.

The changing role of American workers within a national and international economy is at the root of many of the problems being experienced by the poor in cities and rural areas. Mechanization, automation, and the exportation of jobs to countries with cheap labor are eliminating the need for workers with little education. Jobs in farming, mining, timber, and routine manufacturing in sectors such as textiles, automobiles and steel, which formerly provided an employment niche for high-school graduates are drying up. This development limits the job opportunities for less educated workers in both inner cities and rural areas.

CONCEPTUALIZATION AND MEASUREMENT OF THE UNDERCLASS

Numerous conceptualizations of the underclass emerged during the 1980s, but none has won the endorsement of the majority of underclass scholars. In the present study we use the term "underclass" to mean individuals who simultaneously exhibit several problematic characteristics.

---

[19] Kelvin Pollard and William O'Hare, "Beyond High School: The Experience of Rural and Urban Youth in the 1980s," *PRB Working Paper* (Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau, 1990).

[20] John D. Kasarda, "Urban Industrial Transition and the Underclass," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (1989): 26-47.

[21] David Brown and Kenneth Deavers, *Rural Economic Development in the 1980s* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1987).

While some observers view the underclass as a new phenomenon, one can trace its conceptual roots back through time. More than 100 years ago, Karl Marx described the "lumpenproleteriat" in terms that sound very similar to today's descriptions of the underclass.[22] In the 1960s, Oscar Lewis wrote of people living in the "culture of poverty"—again, a description that sounds very much like a current depiction of underclass life.[23] And Gunnar Myrdal in 1962 predicted that rising unemployment would trap an "under-class" at the bottom of society.[24]

The underclass concept employed in this study is closely linked to that developed by Ricketts and Sawhill who identified four specific traits that are associated with the underclass and measurable with census data.[25] Ricketts and Sawhill defined underclass areas as census tracts with a high proportion of: 1) high school dropouts (16 to 19 year olds who are not enrolled in school and are not high-school graduates); 2) males age 16 and older who are not regularly attached to the labor force (working regularly was defined as having a full- or part-time job for more than 26 weeks in 1979); 3) welfare recipients (households receiving public assistance income); and 4) female heads (households headed by unmarried women with children). Our operationalization of these variables is described in the section that follows.

While Ricketts and Sawhill used the traits list above to identify underclass areas, the same traits are used in this study to identify underclass individuals. For purposes of this study, the underclass population is identified as adults who exhibit all three of the following problematic traits:

1) Has not completed high school;
2) Receives public assistance;
3) If female, is a never married mother; or
   If male, lacks attachment to the labor force (that is, long-term unemployed).

Possession of multiple indicators of underclass membership makes it more likely that a person is a true member of the underclass.

Recently, some scholars have rejected the term underclass.[26] While we sympathize with

---

[22]Karl Marx, *Das Capital*, vol 1. translation by Ben Fowkes, (New York: Penguin Books, 1976): 797.

[23]Oscar Lewis, *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty - San Juan and New York* (New York: Random House, 1966).

[24]Gunnar Myrdal, *Challenge of Affluence* (New York: Pantheon, 1962) p. 34.

[25]Erol R. Ricketts and Isabel V. Sawhill, "Defining and Measuring the Underclass," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 7/2 (1988): 316-325.

[26]William Julius Wilson, "Studying Inner-City Social Dislocation," *American Sociological Review* 56/1 (February 1991); Christopher Jencks, "There is No Underclass," *The Wall Street Journal* (17 April 1991); and Herbert J. Gans, "Deconstructing the Underclass: The Term's Dangers as a Planning Concept," *American*

some of the reasons for rejecting the term underclass, we feel it is an appropriate term because the present study is methodologically and conceptually linked to Ricketts and Sawhill's earlier study that explicitedly used the term underclass. Therefore, we feel it is appropriate to continue using the same term in order to provide a consistent line of research and to enhance collective knowledge.

Furthermore, the term has been widely used by a host of serious scholars and policymakers. The study here is a continuation of a broad research stream that has employed that term. The term underclass is useful for distinguishing a group of individuals who are disconnected from society from those who are merely poor. It is also useful because the term has been accepted by political liberals and conservatives and has captured the attention of policymakers. Use of the term provides an opportunity for dialogue between camps that often do not communicate with one another.

Regardless of the term used, it is clear that a person with all three of the problematic traits outlined above is truly disadvantaged.

DATA AND DEFINITIONS

Data in the 1980 and 1990 March Current Population Survey (CPS), released by the Bureau of the Census, are used in this study to identify individuals who belong to the underclass. The CPS is a nationally representative sample survey of approximately 55,000 households. The March CPS questionnaire contains information on the demographic, income, educational attainment, family structure, and labor-force participation characteristics of individuals in the survey.

The analysis was conducted using only persons who were ages 19 to 64 (the working age population). A significant portion of the underclass—children and elderly—are therefore not included here.

While the unit of analysis for this study is the individual, it was sometimes necessary to include household and family information associated with an individual. For example, the CPS data only indicate that a household received food stamps; it does not indicate which individuals within the household were eligible for food stamps. In our analysis if a person lived in a household receiving food stamps, it was assumed that all individuals in the household benefited from the food stamps and the individual was assigned the status of welfare dependent.

While the method of identification is not unusual, it is bothersome from a couple of perspectives. First, an individual living in a household that receives welfare benefits may not actually be part of the needy unit. For example, it would not be appropriate to assign

---

Planning Association 56/3 (1990).

welfare recipient status to a boarder who lives with a family that receives food stamps. Such instances, however, are probably rare.

A second drawback to the approach used here is the fact that no attempt is made to measure the amount of welfare received or what role welfare benefits play in the overall income of the individual or family. For example, an individual who receives very limited benefits from one program is treated the same as an individual who receives benefits from multiple programs. Also, an individual who receives only a minor share of their income from welfare is treated the same as someone who is totally dependent on such assistance. We will attempt to refine this measure in later studies.

Cities and Rural Areas

The CPS identifies individuals as living in metropolitan or nonmetropolitan areas. Within metropolitan areas, distinctions can be made between those living in central cities or in the balance of the metropolitan area (that is, the suburbs). For the remainder of this report, individuals who live in nonmetropolitan areas are considered to reside in rural areas. Those living in central cities of metropolitan areas are regarded as the urban population.

To avoid the possible disclosure of data about individuals, the location of an individual is occasionally suppressed on the CPS file. The central city/suburban status of 16.1 percent of 1990 CPS population was "not identifiable." Similarly, the central city/suburban status of 8.3 percent of the 1980 CPS was "not identifiable." Although this suppression restricts the size of the sample that is available for certain parts of our analysis, it is unlikely to introduce any serious biases.

The Underclass

Three underclass traits similar to the ones used by Ricketts and Sawhill were identified in both the 1980 and 1990 March CPS.[27] These traits were identified as dichotomous variables. The three underclass traits examined in the study are: being a high school dropout, receiving public assistance, and being either an unemployed male or a never-married mother (see figure 1). A discussion of how each of these measures was determined follows.

High-School Dropouts

Individuals considered to be high-school dropouts are those age 19 to 64 who had not yet completed four years of high school. There are some 19-year-olds still in high school, but this presents only a minor problem. In 1990 such cases represent only 0.2% of the 19 to 64 year-old population. In 1990, 17.2 percent of the 19 to 64 year-old population were high-school dropouts.

---

[27] Ricketts and Sawhill, "Underclass," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*.

Figure 1. Definitions of Variables

Variable	Definition
High-school dropout	Person age 19 or older who has not completed 12th grade
Welfare recipient	Person who lives in a family or household receiving one or more of the following government benefits: 1) Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) 2) Other cash public assistance such as general assistance or Supplemental Security Income 3) Medicaid 4) Free or reduced price school lunch 5) Living in a public housing project 6) Government rent subsidy 7) Food stamps 8) Energy assistance (not available on 1980 file)
Never-married mother	A women whose marital status is never married and who has at least one own child under age 18 living with her.
Unemployed man	A male who was unemployed or reported that he worked less than 26 weeks last year and was not "in school" or "unable to work".
Poverty	Income below 125 percent of the government's official poverty level.

Receipt of Public Assistance

Several variables reflecting receipt of means-tested public assistance are recorded in the CPS at the household, family, and person level. The list below specifies the types of means-tested public assistance that are recorded on the CPS file:

1) Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC);
2) Other cash public assistance such as general assistance or Supplemental Security Income;
3) Medicaid;
4) Free or reduced price school lunch;
5) Living in a public housing project;
6) Government rent subsidy;
7) Food stamps;
8) Energy assistance (not available on 1980 file).

A person receiving any of the benefits identified above or a person living in a household receiving any such benefits was characterized as receiving welfare. No distinction was made between those receiving benefits from multiple programs and those receiving benefits from only one program. Even if only one type of assistance was received, the individual was still

considered a welfare recipient for this study. This may be an overly lenient criteria and one which we may want to modify in later studies after we have had more time to study the implications of alternatives. In 1990, 13.8 percent of the 19- to 64-year-old population received some form of means-tested public assistance.

Never-Married Mothers

Determination of never-married mothers from the March CPS data was somewhat circuitous. The CPS questionnaire did not record parenthood on the person record, leaving determination of parenthood to a set of logical inferences. To check the validity of the number of women who were never-married mothers, the numbers we calculated using the CPS data were checked against figures published by the Census Bureau.[28]

Following the procedures of the Census Bureau, never-married women with children were considered to be members of primary families, related subfamilies, or unrelated subfamilies. Further, these women were required to reside in families in which their own never-married children under age 18 were present. Finally, the women had to be considered as the reference person of the family or subfamily.

We calculated that there were 8,182,000 never-married mothers in 1990. This number is very close to the number of never-married female-headed families reported in printed Census Bureau reports (a difference of 0.2 percent). The difference may be partially explained by the difference in weighting factors used to estimate the number of families vs. the number of persons. In 1990, 10.7 percent of all women ages 19 to 64 were never-married mothers.

Unemployed Men

Ricketts and Sawhill identify "prime-age males not regularly attached to the labor force" as one of the four indicators of the underclass. These are 18- to 64-year-old males who did not work full-time or part-time for more than 26 weeks during the previous year. Since our analysis was performed for individuals ages 19 to 64, the age range of our target population is slightly different from the definition used by Ricketts and Sawhill.

Unemployed men were defined as those who were unemployed the whole year as well as those employed (full-time or part-time) for less than 27 weeks during the previous calendar year. As in the Ricketts and Sawhill analysis, students and disabled persons were excluded from the unemployed male category. In 1990, 12.8 percent of all men ages 19 to 64 were unemployed.

Poverty

In the analysis presented here, we examine the relationship between underclass status and poverty. While there is a close association between underclass status and poverty status,

---

[28]U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Household and Family Characteristics: March 1990 and 1989," *Current Population Reports*, P-20, no. 447 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1991): table F.

they are not identical. Many individuals who are in the underclass have incomes above the official poverty line; likewise, even more individuals who have incomes below poverty are not in the underclass. Furthermore, the relationship between underclass membership and poverty varies across groups.

The official U.S. government poverty indicator is a series of income thresholds based on family size and age composition. The poverty income threshold for an average family of four in 1990 was $13,359.[29]

The CPS files contain a variable that records the ratio of family income to the poverty threshold. Persons who live in families that were characterized as having income below 125 percent of the poverty level were considered to be poor. The 1980 CPS reflects poverty in 1979; the 1990 CPS reflects poverty in 1989.

We identified individuals with incomes below 125 percent of the official poverty level as the poverty population for several reasons. First, O'Hare, Mann, Porter and Greenstein have reported that the American public would set the poverty line about 24 percent higher than current government levels.[30] O'Hare et al. suggested that this public sentiment probably reflects the inadequacy of the government poverty level.

Second, most government means-tested assistance programs use income eligibility thresholds that are higher than the poverty level. For example, the food stamp program uses 130 percent of poverty as the eligibility threshold. This is interpreted as an implicit rejection of the official poverty thresholds as being too low.

Finally, many low-income individuals have irregular income. They tend to be marginally attached to the labor force and work in temporary, part-time, or intermittent jobs. Many people with income just above the poverty threshold in one year will be officially poor the next. Using a poverty definition that is slightly higher than the official definition will capture many of these individuals.

FINDINGS

The results of our analysis of the rural underclass are presented in four sections. First, we provide an overview of the characteristics of the underclass population, as defined above. Second, we focus on differences between the rural and urban underclass populations. Next, we look at changes that occurred to the rural and urban underclasses during the 1980s,

---

[29]U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Poverty in the United States: 1990," *Current Population Reports* P-60, no. 175, (Washington, DC: GPO, 1991).

[30]William P. O'Hare, Taynia Mann, Kathryn Porter and Robert Greenstein, *Real Life Poverty in America: Where the American Public Would Set the Poverty Line* (Washington, DC: A Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and Families USA Foundation Report, 1990).

particularly by race and geographic area. Finally, we look more closely at blacks and whites in the large cities of the North and in the rural South to see if there is support for the hypothesis that the black underclass in large northern cities has its origins in the rural South.

Overview of the Underclass

Table 1 provides data on selected demographic and geographic characteristics of the underclass (or multiple-problem population) in 1990, as defined in this study. As the table shows, there were slightly more than 3 million adults (ages 19-64) in the underclass in 1990. They represented 2.1 percent of the adult population in the United States. Four out of five underclass members were living in poverty.

The top three panels of Table 1 show demographic characteristics of the underclass. There are slightly more women than men in the underclass (1.655 million women compared to 1.430 million men). Women had a slightly higher rate of underclass membership (2.2 percent) than men (2.0 percent).

Minorities are much more likely than non-Hispanic whites (hereafter referred to simply as whites) to be in the underclass. In 1990, nearly 7 percent of the black adult population was in the underclass compared with just 1 percent of the white adult population. About 5.5 percent of Hispanic adults were found in the underclass—a relatively high proportion when compared with whites, but slightly lower than that of blacks.

Young adults (ages 19-34) are about twice as likely to be in the underclass as people ages 50 to 64. More than half (56 percent) of the adult underclass population are in the 19-34 age group.

The high prevalence of underclass characteristics among minorities and young adults conforms to popular images of the underclass population.

Table 1 also provides data on the locational characteristics of the underclass population in 1990. The data on central cities, suburbs, and rural areas do not sum to the total because the place of residence codes for 16 percent of the individuals in the CPS were withheld to protect confidentiality.

Almost half (49 percent) of the underclass identified in the CPS live in central cities, while slightly less than one-quarter (23 percent) live in suburbs and slightly more than one-quarter (28 percent) live in rural areas. The rate of underclass membership in central cities (3.4 percent) is more than three times that in suburbs (1.1 percent). The rate in rural areas is 2.4 percent.

In terms of regional location, the size of the underclass population in the South (1,258,000) is slightly larger than that in the Northeast and Midwest combined (1,241,000).

Table 1.
Demographic and Geographic Characteristics of Underclass Adults Ages 19-64, 1990

Characteristic	Number in Underclass* (in 1000s)	Percent of Population Group in Underclass	Percent of the Underclass who are in Poverty
Total	**3,085**	**2.1**	**80**
Gender			
Male	1,430	2.0	73
Female	1,655	2.2	85
Age			
19-34	1,719	2.6	83
35-49	825	1.6	78
50-64	541	1.7	70
Race			
Non-Hispanic white	1,112	1.0	73
Non-Hispanic black	1,158	6.8	84
Non-Hispanic other races	143	2.9	82
Hispanic	672	5.5	83
Place of residence*			
Central cities	1,279	3.4	85
Suburbs	615	1.1	74
Rural areas	736	2.4	77
Region			
Northeast	541	1.8	81
Midwest	700	2.0	82
South	1,258	2.5	78
West	586	1.9	78

*Central city and suburban status was withheld for about 16 percent of the sample to protect confidentiality

Furthermore, the proportion of the adult population in the South with underclass characteristics (2.5 percent) is higher than any other region.

The large numeric concentration and the high prevalence rate of the underclass in central cities supports the popular conception of the underclass. However, data on the regional distribution of the underclass do not support the general notion that the underclass is mostly concentrated in the large industrial cities of the North. This point will be explored in more detail later in this report.

Because of the parallel economic and demographic trends of central cities and rural areas identified earlier in this paper, one would expect populations in these two types of

areas to exhibit a much higher prevalence of underclass characteristics than the suburban population. Table 2 provides analysis of 1990 CPS data related to this point.

As one would expect, central cities and rural areas are clearly different than suburban areas in terms of the prevalence of individuals with underclass characteristics. On every indicator examined, the suburban population is well below the other two types of areas. The remainder of this study, therefore, will focus only on comparisons between central cities and rural (or nonmetropolitan) areas.

Comparisons of the Rural and Urban Underclass

What are the demographic characteristics of the rural underclass and how do they compare to the urban underclass? Table 3 provides data comparing rural and central-city underclass populations in 1980 and 1990. First we will explore differences between the rural and urban underclass populations in 1990, and then look at changes that occurred between 1980 and 1990.

There are several notable differences between the rural and central-city underclass populations in 1990. Women comprise less than half (47 percent) of the rural underclass, but they account for 60 percent of the urban underclass. This difference may be due to the higher share of young urban females who are never-married mothers. Table 2 indicates that females in central cities were almost 50 percent more likely than those in rural areas to be a never-married mother.

Table 2.
Percent of Adults (ages 19 to 64) Having Specific Underclass Characteristics in Central Cities, Suburbs, and Rural Areas: 1990

	Total	Central city	Balance of metro area (suburbs)	Nonmetro
High school dropout	17.2%	20.6%	13.2%	21.4%
Receiving public assistance	13.8	19.0	8.9	17.1
Never-married mothers	10.7	14.9	8.4	10.3
Unemployed men	12.8	15.7	10.4	14.4
Underclass*				
Percent	2.1	3.4	1.1	2.4
Population (in 1000s)	3,085	1,279	615	736
Weighted totals (in 1000s)	148,725	37,464	56,760	30,558
Unweighted totals	93,579	22,530	31,696	22,009

* The underclass is made up of persons who have all three underclass characteristics specified in the text.
Note: Categories are **not** mutually exclusive. The percent of never-married mothers is based on the total number of women rather than the total population. The percent of unemployed men is based on the total number of men.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Table 3.
Demographic Characteristics of Underclass Adults in Central Cities and Rural Areas: 1980 and 1990

	Central Cities				Rural Areas			
	Percent of Underclass		Percent of Population Group in Underclass		Percent of Underclass		Percent of Population Group in Underclass	
	1980	1990	1980	1990	1980	1990	1980	1990
Total	-	-	3.4	3.4	-	-	2.4	2.4
Gender								
Male	35%	40%	2.6	2.8	50%	53%	2.4	2.6
Female	65	60	4.4	4.0	50	47	2.3	2.2
Ages								
19-34	54	59	3.8	4.2	46	48	2.4	2.9
35-49	30	26	4.3	2.8	33	28	2.6	2.0
50-64	16	15	2.3	2.5	22	23	1.9	2.2
Race								
Non-Hispanic white	25	17	1.3	1.0	59	55	1.6	1.5
Non-Hispanic black	54	49	8.7	7.5	32	32	9.0	9.1
Hispanic	19	29	7.0	6.7	7	8	6.6	7.0
Regions								
Northeast	33	29	4.7	4.5	8	5	1.3	1.1
Midwest	27	27	4.1	4.3	18	19	1.4	1.4
South	27	23	3.2	2.6	67	65	3.1	3.5
West	13	21	2.1	2.7	7	11	2.4	2.1

Note: The subgroups of a category may not add to the total because of rounding.

The rural underclass also has proportionately fewer younger members and more older members. In 1990, less than half (48 percent) of the rural underclass were ages 19 to 34, whereas nearly three-fifths (59 percent) of the urban underclass were in this young age group. On the other hand, nearly one-quarter (23 percent) of the rural underclass in 1990 were ages 50 to 64, but only 15 percent of the urban underclass were in this age bracket. The prevalence of underclass characteristics among young adults in central cities (4.2 percent) is 45 percent higher than that seen among young adults in rural areas (2.9 percent). The rural-urban gap among those ages 50 to 64 is much narrower.

There are also striking rural-urban differences in terms of the racial composition of the underclass population. In rural areas, 55 percent of the underclass is white compared with

only 17 percent in central cities. On the other hand, blacks account for about one-third (32 percent) of the rural underclass, but they comprise nearly half (49 percent) of the urban underclass. Hispanics are also more prominent among the urban underclass (29 percent) than the rural underclass (8 percent). Rural-urban differences in racial composition of the underclass reflect the urban concentration of blacks and Hispanics in general.

Although blacks make up a much larger share of the underclass in urban areas than in rural areas, this is because blacks are a much larger share of the overall population in central cities, not because blacks who live in central cities are more prone to be in the underclass. The prevalence or rate of underclass membership among blacks is actually higher in rural areas (9.1 percent) than in urban areas (7.5 percent).

There are also significant differences in the regional distribution of the rural and urban underclasses. The rural underclass is highly concentrated in the South, while the urban underclass is more evenly distributed among the four census regions. Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of the rural underclass in 1990 resided in the South, and the South is the only region where the underclass rate is higher for rural residents (3.5 percent) than for urban residents (2.6 percent). In the Northeast and Midwest, for example, the underclass rate in central cities is nearly four times that of rural areas.

Changes in the Rural and Urban Underclass During the 1980s

Assessing changes in the underclass population during the 1980s is somewhat complicated because of technical changes in the CPS files. In 1984, for example, the sampling frame for the CPS was dramatically changed to take account of numerous changes in metropolitan area boundaries that had occurred since 1972. Because of this change in the CPS sampling frame, the status of nearly 20 million individuals was changed from nonmetropolitan to metropolitan between 1983 and 1985. This change also affects comparisons made between 1980 and 1990. In addition, the Census Bureau suppressed the central city-suburban identifying codes for a larger share of people in 1990 than in 1980. As a result, it is inappropriate to compare changes in raw numbers between 1980 and 1990; however, one can look at distributional changes and changes in rates over the decade.

As seen in table 3, the rates of underclass membership remained constant in both rural areas and central cities during the 1980s. In rural areas the rate of underclass membership was 2.4 percent in both years. Similarly, the central cities' rate remained constant at 3.4 percent at both points in time. Likewise, there were no major changes in the characteristics of the underclass population during the 1980s, but several small shifts are worth noting.

In both rural areas and central cities, for example, males became a larger share of the underclass population between 1980 and 1990. The shift was three percentage points in rural areas and five percentage points in central cities. This may be related to changes in the occupational structure during the 1980s which reduced the job prospects for men with limited educational attainment.

Young adults also increased their share of the adult underclass population during the 1980s. In rural areas the share of the underclass population ages 19 to 34 grew from 46 to 48 percent; in central cities, it increased from 54 to 59 percent.

The racial composition of the underclass remained relatively constant in rural areas during the decade. There was a small decrease in the proportion of whites who were in the underclass (59 percent in 1980 vs. 55 percent in 1990) and a small increase in the share of Hispanics and other races who were members of the underclass. (The data for other races are not shown because the sample size is extremely small.)

Changes in racial composition were more dramatic in the urban areas. In central cities, both whites and blacks became a smaller share of the underclass population as the share of Hispanics grew from 19 percent in 1980 to 29 percent in 1990. This change reflects the dynamic growth in the number of Hispanics in urban areas during the 1980s. Despite the fact that Hispanics became a much larger share of the central city underclass between 1980 and 1990, the Hispanic rate of underclass membership, however, actually decreased slightly over the decade.

There was little change in the distribution of the rural underclass across regions, and only a small increase in the rate of underclass membership in the rural South between 1980 and 1990. In contrast, the share of the nation's underclass in central cities decreased in the Northeast and South but increased dramatically in the West, growing from 13 percent in 1980 to 21 percent in 1990. This increase parallels the growth and expansion of metropolitan areas in the West and no doubt reflects the large increase in the Hispanic underclass during the decade.

The Underclass in Large Northern Cities and the Rural South

In previous studies the underclass has typically been associated with large cities of the North, particularly those with a heavy industrial base. There is a widespread perception that the underclass problem is one that exists primarily in the major cities of the North. In his American Sociological Association presidential address, William J. Wilson wrote, "It is clear, then, that one of the legacies of historic racial and class subjugation in America is a unique and growing concentration of minority residents in the most impoverished areas of large Northeastern and Midwestern central cities."[31] Also, several recent reviews of the literature on the underclass focused exclusively on urban areas.[32]

However, most hypotheses which attempt to explain the emergence or existence of a

---

[31]Wilson, William J., "Studying Inner-City Social Dislocations," *American Sociological Review* 56/1 (Feb. 1991): 4.

[32]Gephart and Pearson, 1988, "Urban Underclass," 1988.; William R. Prosser, "The Underclass: Assessing What We Have Learned," *Focus* 13/2 (Summer 1991) University of Wisconsin, Institute for Research on Poverty; and Mincy, Sawhill and Wolf, "The Underclass" *Science*: 450-453.

large black underclass in the inner-cities of the North have not been fully supported by the data. White racism has been forwarded by some as the reason for the high prevalence of underclass characteristics among blacks, but a number of recent studies indicate that racism, while still evident, has decreased during the period when the black underclass emerged.[33]

Urban demographics have also been blamed for the emergence of a black underclass in large cities. Wilson argues that the movement of middle-class blacks out of black ghetto areas led to a high concentration of poor blacks in certain areas of central cities.[34] However, Farley found little change in the residential segregation of blacks by class between 1970 and 1980.[35] Furthermore, Emerson found that central cities experienced a net in-migration of poor blacks during the 1986-88 period, so that the concentration of poor blacks in certain parts of large cities is not solely the product of outmigration of middle-class blacks.[36]

Lemann offers a new and provocative theory to explain the origins of the black urban underclass.[37] He implies that poor blacks moving out of the rural South brought underclass characteristics with them to large cities of the North. We examine that theory in this section by contrasting underclass rates in large cities of the North with those in the rural South. If the rural black population in the South is the source of the northern urban underclass, then we would expect to see a higher prevalence of underclass characteristics among rural southern blacks than among northern urban blacks. On the other hand, if underclass behavior among blacks is linked to life in northern cities, then we would expect to see a higher prevalence of underclass characteristics among blacks in northern urban areas than among blacks in the rural South.

The CPS data do not allow us to identify people by the size of the city where they live, but do allow us to identify individuals who live in central cities of large metropolitan areas. While this is not a direct measure of central city size, most large cities are located in large metropolitan areas.

---

[33]National Research Council, *A Common Destiny: Blacks and American Society* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1989): chapter 3. See also William J. Wilson, *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

[34]Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged.*

[35]Reynolds Farley, "Residential Segregation of Social and Economic Groups Among Blacks: 1970-80," in *The Urban Underclass* edited by Christopher Jencks and Paul Petersen, (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1991): 274-298.

[36]Michael O. Emerson, "The Role of Migration in Concentrating Black Poverty in Central Cities." (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Population Association of America, 1990).

[37]Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

Table 4 provides underclass data for central cities in large and small metropolitan areas by region. Large metropolitan areas contain 1 million or more people; small metropolitan areas have less than 1 million people.

Of the 1,279,000 underclass adults in all central cities, 1,015,000, or 79 percent, resided in a large central city in 1990. Furthermore, the rate of underclass prevalence was higher in large central cities than in small central cities (3.7 percent in large central cities versus 2.6 percent in small ones). This relationship was observed in every region except the West. The differences in the underclass rates between large and small central cities in the Northeast and Midwest are substantial. The anomaly in the West may be the result of concentrations of impoverished Hispanics in many middle-sized cities in this region of the country.[38] It should also be noted that the rate of underclass membership in the West in based on a small number of observations.

Table 4.
Prevalence of Adults with Underclass Characteristics in Geographic Areas: 1990

	Number in Underclass (in 1000s)	Percent of Population in Underclass	Percent of Underclass who are in Poverty
Large Central Cities[a]	**1,015**	**3.7**	**85**
Northeast	338	4.7	85
Midwest	285	4.6	89
South	184	3.0	85
West	207	2.6	80
Small Central Cities[b]	**264**	**2.6**	**85**
Northeast	31	2.9	87
Midwest	63	3.2	81
South	110	2.2	91
West	60	3.1	78
Rural Areas	**736**	**2.4**	**77**
Northeast	38	1.1	63
Midwest	138	1.4	70
South	478	3.5	79
West	82	2.1	78

[a] Central cities in metropolitan areas of 1 million or more people.
[b] Central cities in metropolitan areas less than 1 million people.

[38] Refugio I. Rochin and Monica D. Castillo, "Immigration, Demographic Change, and Colonia Formation in California: A Cross Sectional Analysis of Rural Communities with High Concentrations of Latinos," Working Paper No. 91-7, Department of Agricultural Economics, University of California at Davis, 1991.

The rate of underclass membership is higher in the large central cities of the Northeast (4.7 percent) and Midwest (4.6 percent) than in the South (3.0 percent) or the West (2.6 percent). The relatively large number of underclass members and the high rate of underclass membership in the large northern cities reinforce the image of the underclass as being a "big city" problem located primarily in the North.

How does the underclass in large northern cities compare to that in the rural South? Table 4 also provides data on the rural underclass population by Census region. The size of the underclass in the rural South (478,000) is about four-fifths (77 percent) of the size in the large cities of the North (623,000). The underclass rate in the rural South (3.5 percent) is about three-quarters that in the large northern cities. This table indicates that the urban underclass is concentrated in large cities rather than small ones and that a disproportionate share of the urban underclass is in northern cities. However, this table does not provide information separately for blacks, which is key to testing Lemann's hypothesis.

Table 5 provides underclass data on large northern cities and the rural South by race for 1980 and 1990. Overall, the rate of underclass membership in 1990 is higher in large central cities of the North (4.7 percent) than in rural areas of the South (3.5 percent). However, additional data presented in that table show that when blacks and whites are examined separately, the underclass rate is higher for each racial group in the rural South than in the large central cities of the North. In 1990, almost one in ten (9.7 percent) black adults in the rural South fall into the underclass as defined in this study while the rate for blacks in large northern central cities was somewhat lower at 8.6 percent.

Table 5.
Underclass by Race in Large Cities of the North and in the Rural South: 1980 and 1990

	Large Cities of the North				Rural South			
	Number in Underclass (in 1000s)		Percent of Group in Underclass		Number in Underclass (in 1000s)		Percent of Group in Underclass	
	1980	1990	1980	1990	1980	1990	1980	1990
Total	535	623	5.0%	4.7%	558	478	3.1%	3.5%
Non-Hispanic white	102	112	1.7	1.6	273	210	1.8	2.0
Non-Hispanic black	305	349	9.5	8.6	251	234	9.6	9.7

The higher overall underclass rate in the urban North is due to the racial composition of large northern cities relative to the rural South. Blacks are more likely to be in the underclass and blacks are a larger share of the population of large northern central cities. In 1990, 30 percent of the population in large northern central cities were blacks compared with only 18 percent of the population in the rural South.

If social forces found primarily in the urban North were responsible for the emergence of the black underclass there, then one would expect the black underclass rate in large northern cities to increase between 1980 and 1990. On the other hand, if the black urban underclass in northern cities was the result of blacks moving to the North from the rural South, then a decline between 1980 and 1990 would be expected because the net flow of southern blacks moving North stopped by the mid-1970s.

The trends in underclass rates of blacks in the rural South and blacks in the large cities of the North are moving in opposite directions. Between 1980 and 1990, the rate of underclass membership among blacks in the urban North declined from 9.5 to 8.6 percent but among blacks in the rural South there was a slight increase (from 9.6 to 9.7 percent).

This adds further support for the idea that the black underclass in northern cities is closely linked to migration of rural southern blacks into northern cities.

The Deep South and the Border South States

The Census Bureau's definition of the South includes states as far north as Delaware and Maryland, and as far west as Texas and Oklahoma. In sociological studies, particularly those involving race, it is often useful to make a distinction between the deep South and the rest of the South (border states). The history of race relations in the rural areas of the deep South, where plantation economies dominated economic development, is somewhat different than the history in border states.

In table 6 underclass data are presented for the deep South and the southern border states. About 60 percent of the southern rural underclass lived in the deep South in 1990 and these states had slightly higher rates of underclass membership (3.7 percent in the deep South compared with 3.2 percent in the border states in 1990). In fact, between 1980 and 1990 there was a notable increase in the percent of people in the underclass in the deep South (3.0 to 3.7 percent) while the rate in the border states remained constant.

The underclass rate among whites is higher in the border south states than in the deep South. This is probably a reflection of the fact that the border states include much of poverty-stricken Appalachia.

The prevalence of underclass characteristics among blacks is slightly higher in the deep South (9.8 percent) than in the border South (9.0 percent in 1990), but the number of underclass blacks in the rural areas of the border South states (43,000 in 1990) indicates that the underclass figures for this group are based on a relatively small sample and are probably not very reliable.

It is also noteworthy that only 62 percent of underclass whites in the deep South are also in poverty compared to 91 percent of underclass blacks. In the border states, the share of the underclass population that is also poor is nearly the same for whites and blacks.

In the deep South, the economic consequences of underclass membership seems to be quite different for blacks and whites. *Among blacks and whites with the same set of underclass characteristics, blacks are 50 percent more likely than whites to be poor.* This is undoubtedly related to the history of intense discrimination against blacks in this region of the country. It may also reflect on-going power relationships among blacks and whites in the rural South.

Table 6.
Underclass in Rural Areas of the Deep South and Border States

	Number in Underclass (in 1000s)		Percent of Population in Underclass		Percent of Underclass who are in Poverty	
	1980	1990	1980	1990	1980	1990
Deep South States[a]	313	285	3.0	3.7	80	83
Border South States[b]	245	193	3.2	3.2	72	75
Deep South States						
Whites	118	86	1.4	1.5	73	62
Blacks	190	194	9.0	9.8	85	91
Border States						
Whites	158	124	2.3	2.4	66	73
Blacks	61	43	12.4	9.0	85	70

[a] Deep South includes Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia.
[b] Border States include Delaware, Maryland, D.C., West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas.

CONCLUSION

The prevailing image of the underclass among contemporary scholars is captured by Wilson: "It is clear, then, that one of the legacies of historic racial and class subjugation in America is a unique and growing concentration of minority residents in the most impoverished areas of large Northeastern and Midwestern central cities.[39] The research presented here suggests that northern inner-city minorities are not unique and by some measures the black underclass is more highly concentrated in the rural South than in the urban North.

While most previous research on the underclass has focused on urban centers, the research presented here indicates that the prevalence of underclass characteristics is high in rural areas as well. This study indicates that there is a sizable rural underclass located

[39]William J. Wilson, "Studying Inner-City Social Dislocations," *American Sociological Review* 56/1 (Feb. 1991): 4.

primarily in the South. Furthermore, when differences in racial composition are controlled, the prevalence of underclass characteristics is higher in the rural areas of the South than in the big cities of the North. Blacks in the rural South actually have a higher prevalence of underclass characteristics than do blacks in the large cities of the urban North.

The findings of this study provide two new ideas that underclass scholars cannot afford to ignore. First, it suggest that underclass characteristics are not exclusively urban. By some measures, underclass characteristics are more prevalent among rural blacks than blacks in the large cities of the North.

Second, the data analyzed here provide some support to a new theory regarding formation of the black urban underclass in northern cities. Namely, that the black underclass in large northern cities is the result of poor blacks migrating from the rural South to the large industrial cities of the North.

The evidence examined here is far from conclusive regarding the Lemann hypotheses. There are competing hypothesis that could explain the data presented in this study. For example, it could be that the same factors that led to the emergence of a black underclass in northern cities (racism, industrial change, selective outmigration) were also present in the rural South. Nonetheless, the data examined here lend support to Lemann's thesis that the black underclass of the urban industrial North may have its origins in the rural South. While Lemann's hypothesis requires additional investigation before any firm conclusions can be reached his ideas deserve serious consideration by underclass scholars.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adams, Terry, and Greg J. Duncan. "Long-Term Poverty in Nonmetropolitan Areas." Paper presented at conference on rural poverty sponsored by the Aspen Institute and the Ford Foundation, Queenstown, MD, 1990.

Auletta, Ken. *The Underclass*. New York: Random House, 1982.

Bellamy, D. "Economic and Socio-Demographic Change in Persistent Low-Income Counties: An Update." Paper presented at the Southern Rural Sociological Association, New Orleans, LA, 1988.

Brown, David, and Kenneth Deavers. *Rural Economic Development in the 1980s.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1987.

Dash, Leon. "At Risk: The Chronicles of Teenage Pregnancy," *Washington Post* (26-31 January 1986).

Davidson, Osha Gray. *Broken Heartland: The Rise of America's Rural Ghetto*. New York: The Free Press, 1990.

Duncan, Greg. *Years of Poverty, Years of Plenty*. Ann Arbor: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, 1984, table 2.2, p. 49.

Emerson, Michael O. "The Role of Migration in Concentrating Black Poverty in Central Cities." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Population Association of America, Toronto, 1990

Farley, Reynolds. "Residential Segregation of Social and Economic Groups Among Blacks: 1970-80." In *The Urban Underclass*. Christopher Jencks and Paul Petersen, eds. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1991, p. 274-298.

Gans, Herbert J. "Deconstructing the Underclass: The Term's Dangers as a Planning Concept," *America Planning Association* 56/3 (1990).

Gephart, Martha A., and Robert Pearson. "Contemporary Research on the Urban Underclass," *Items* 42 (June 1988): 1-10.

Gilder, George. *Wealth and Poverty.* New York: Bantam Books, 1981.

Jencks, Christopher. "There is no Underclass," *The Wall Street Journal* (17 April 1991).

Jencks, Christopher, and Paul E. Petersen. *The Urban Underclass*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1991.

Kasarda, John D. "Urban Industrial Transition and the Underclass." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (1989): 26-47.

Lemann, Nicholas. "The Origins of the Underclass," *Atlantic Monthly* (June and July 1986).

Lemann, Nicholas. *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991.

Lewis, Oscar. *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty—San Juan and New York*. New York: Random House, 1966.

Marx, Karl. *Das Capital*, vol 1., trans. by Ben Fowlkes. New York: Penguin Books, 1976, p. 797.

Mincy, Ronald B., Isabel V. Sawhill, and Douglas A. Wolf. "The Underclass: Definitions and Measurement," *Science* 248 (April 1990): 450-454.

Myrdal, Gunnar. *Challenge of Affluence*. New York, Pantheon, 1962, p. 34.

National Research Council. *A Common Destiny: Blacks and American Society*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1989.

O'Hare, WIlliam P. "The Rise of Poverty in Rural America," *Population Trends and Public Policy* 15 (Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau, 1988).

O'Hare, William P., Taynia Mann, Kathryn Porter, and Robert Greenstein. *Real Life Poverty in America: Where the American Public Would Set the Poverty Line*. Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and Families USA, 1990.

Pollard, Kelvin, and William O'Hare. "Beyond High School: The Experience of Rural And Urban Youth in the 1980s." *PRB Working Paper* Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau, 1990.

Prosser, William R. "The Underclass: Assessing What We Have Learned," *Focus* 13/2. Madison, WI: Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin, Summer 1991.

Ricketts, Erol R., and Isabel V. Sawhill. "Defining and Measuring the Underclass," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 7/2 (1988): 316-325.

Rochin, Refugio I., and Monica D. Castillo. "Immigration, Demographic Change, and *Colonia* Formation in California: A Cross Sectional Analysis of Rural Communities with High Concentrations of Latinos." Working Paper No. 91-7, Department of Agricultural Economics, University of California at Davis, 1991.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. "Geographic Mobility: March 1986 to March 1987." *Current Population Reports* P-20, No. 430. Washington, DC: GPO, 1989, table D.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. "Household and Family Characteristics: March 1990 and 1989," *Current Population Reports* P-20, No. 447. Washington, DC: GPO, 1991, table F.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. "Money Income and Poverty Status in the United States: 1990." *Current Population Reports* P-60, No. 175. Washington, DC: GPO, 1991.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. "Poverty in the United States: 1990." *Current Population Reports* P-60, No. 175. Washington, DC: GPO, 1991.

U.S. Department of Agriculture. *1986 Agricultural Chartbook.* chart 11.

Wilson, William J. *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.

Wilson, William Julius. "The Ghetto Underclass: Social Science Perspectives," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political Science* 501 (January 1989).

Wilson, William J. "Studying Inner-City Social Dislocations." *American Sociological Review* 56/1 (Feb. 1991): 4.

Wilson, William J. *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Population Reference Bureau
1875 Connecticut Ave., NW
Suite 520
Washington, D.C. 20009
Tel: (202) 483-1100